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Introduction to MIAP GT-1800

NYU Cinema Studies MIAP

Final Assignment

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### Home Memory: The Mind will Fail so We Must Record

#### **Abstract**

Tomas Haake's lyrics explode through Jens Kidman, as Future Breed Machine begins, "An even strobe / A pulse / Of flashing hate lights / Of synthetic souls / Mass produced / Hammered into shape / A sign of times / Dreams turn / Into systems / A new way / A new breed / Implanted in our minds." Kidman is the lead singer of Mesuggah, a Swedish heavy metal band. Mesuggah's 1995 landmark album Destroy Erase Improve (from which these lyrics are taken) is an omen that now upon us. The world they construct through their music is bleak and painful. Tension is maintained by the sounds created and recorded by the band to position the humxn body as fragile, organic, and inferior. Creativity is a driving force for humxn expression but in this future the body cannot withstand the brutality of violence and disease levied upon it by the modern world. Only a perfect melding of technology and flesh can save us. Mesuggah warn that outcome of destruction for the sake of new technology and mass production will not improve our collective experience. They stress that when we succumb to systems that controls our minds like machines then we have lost our soul.

## Introduction

Home movies capture the subtleties and complex dynamics of our relationships to one another and our environment. The content is not unlike a heavy metal album. Péter Forgács is a filmmaker who examines traumatic historical events through the lens of found home movies.<sup>1</sup> As a society, we look at images and listen to sounds all the time with a desire to find meaning. Art like “Destroy Erase Improve” is subject to interpretation. In writing about Forgács and other filmmakers, Michael S. Roth poses one of many questions, “How are we to think about our lives and about the pictures from them without separating these images from ourselves, from our ordinary world?”<sup>2</sup> Within the moving image, the context and meaning shift to create a unique experience for the viewer. Regardless of how one views it, a home movie is evidence of a life lived.

If you have a smartphone or any other type of recording device, chances are you have made home movies. If you have a social media profile, SMS texting, or email then you are willfully sharing your home movies as well. Those primarily digital assets have value even if they seem like fragments of mundane or everyday life. When accessed, these fragments of memory give an audience (large or small) a glimpse into another life and a new way of seeing that is fixed in time. In this research paper I intend to discuss the importance of “home memory”, which I will define as memories that originate from individuals who create them (on their own or collaboratively). How home memory is preserved, stored, and shared within the context of our private devices and public sphere (which includes the internet). As well as access and control of your data as a necessary element to disseminating ideas that spark new forms of communication

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<sup>1</sup> Karen I. Ishizuka and Patricia Zimmermann. *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). 63.

<sup>2</sup> Ishizuka and Zimmermann. *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*. 65.

to engage with the past as a way to continue to uncover similarities and differences that affect us all.

### **Instability of Media: Home Memory at Risk**

My grandfather Vernon F. Bellows died in 1997 after a brief fight with glioblastoma multiforme, an extremely aggressive form of brain cancer. Glioblastoma multiforme is one of the most devastating types of cancer in humans due to the rapid growth, the way it spreads, ineffective treatments, and the often-short length in time between diagnosis and death.<sup>3</sup> As the cancer tangled its way throughout his brain, Bellows began to lose his ability to remember things such as people's names and a general understanding of what was happening around him. Though his body died at the age of 73, his home memories live on in the videos he recorded on VHS tape throughout his life.

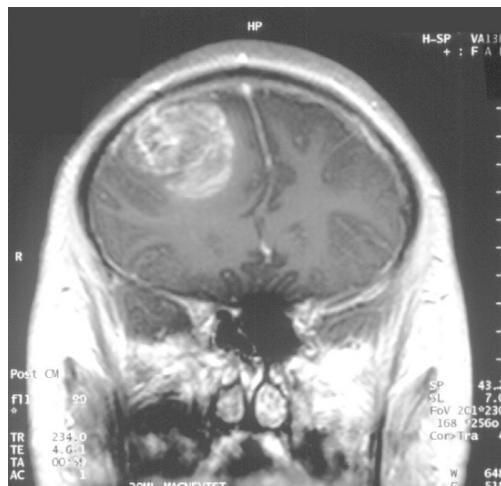


Fig. 1 - Glioblastoma, MR coronal with contrast. Wikipedia.com.

Memory is an essential function of the human brain and there are many diseases that affect the ability to keep those memories accessible. Bellows understood the value of memory and his tireless practice of documenting and preserving life through the use of a VHS camcorder is proof

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<sup>3</sup> Hayat, M. *Tumors of the Central Nervous System, Volume 1*. (Springer, Dordrecht, 2011) 3. [https://link-springer-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/chapter/10.1007/978-94-007-0344-5\\_1#Sec2](https://link-springer-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/chapter/10.1007/978-94-007-0344-5_1#Sec2).

of that. The VHS camcorder was purchased in 1987 by a combined effort of Phyllis and Vernon Bellows and their children. Their children are represented by the last names Bellows, Griess, and Wesselman. Over the course of the equipment's initial purchase until 1995, Vernon Bellows made somewhere around 69 tapes on his own. These tapes range from recordings of broadcast television, family gatherings, to the creation of his own experimental video art.<sup>4</sup> Bellows was fascinated with talk shows in particular as a mode of production: as a source for news, comedy skits, and celebrity interviews. Bellows did his recording work but died prior to any opportunity to access and utilize the internet or world wide web. This would have been prime territory for him to create a vlog<sup>5</sup> or user profile on the various video streaming services that currently exist. Video creations by Bellows, along with the rest of the 30 VHS tapes created by the Griess family, are currently in the state of being archived and preserved for the next generation.

My parents Jim Griess and Robin Griess are the primary personnel in charge of the family video archive. Robin Griess has been interviewed<sup>6</sup> in order to assess the current state of the collection and to gain background on the history of the collection's creation. The interview was conducted by David I. Griess in November of 2019. In the interview the collection inventory and content are discussed, what processes have been used for preservation and archiving, as well as the overall goals for collection. In concluding the interview, it is clear that the archive is currently facing several challenges. Griess has been utilizing a VHS to DVD machine that allows you to migrate the content of the VHS tapes to consumer grade DVD-R, DVD+R, and DVD+RW discs (Fig. 2) bought by the Griesses. The cost and the perceived ease of use of this machine were the main factors in utilizing this method.

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<sup>4</sup> "HUMAN TRASH DUMP - VERNON F BELLOWS." <http://now.bt.co/bundles/vernonfbellows>.

<sup>5</sup> Video blog.

<sup>6</sup> Griess, Robin. "Managing The Family Home Movie Archive: VHS to DVD Transfer as a Short-Term Solution," Interview by David I. Griess. 2019.



*Fig. 2 - A VCR/DVD combo unit similar to the one used by Griess.  
GoVideo. anarchivism.org.*

There are “56 Bellows DVDs (created from Grandpa Vern’s footage) and 24 Griess (GTV) discs created from footage Jim and I filmed” according to Robin Griess. There is also 26 reels of super 8 from the 1980s that have yet to be digitized but have been recorded onto VHS through diy telecine. The process of digitizing content has been extremely labor intensive for the Griesses, which is contrary to what the machine they purchased advertised. So far, this process has spanned the course of seven years. All of the optical disc formats that have already been transferred have the potential of deterioration and are considered to be insufficient for long-term storage.<sup>7</sup> Annie Schweikert cites that the Library of Congress “simply estimates a lifespan of more than 30 years for all discs.”<sup>8</sup> Schweikert goes on to state that optical discs have the potential to become unreadable by laser due to small changes from temperature, fingerprints, and chemicals found in markers that may have been used to label the disc. Additional emphasis is

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<sup>7</sup> Canadian Conservation Institute. “Longevity of Recordable CDs and DVDs – Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) Notes 19/1.” aem, September 14, 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/longevity-recordable-cds-dvds.html>.

<sup>8</sup>Schweikert, Annie. “An Optical Media Preservation Strategy for New York University’s Fales Library & Special Collections”, 2019.

[https://archive.nyu.edu/bitstream/2451/43877/2/Schweikert\\_OpticalMediaPreservationNYU\\_2018.pdf](https://archive.nyu.edu/bitstream/2451/43877/2/Schweikert_OpticalMediaPreservationNYU_2018.pdf).

also placed on the likelihood that the machines that read optical discs are being actively phased out by the commercial market. Macintosh or Mac as it is commonly known has been removing optical drives from their various products since 2008.<sup>9</sup>

Technology companies do not just control product manufacturing, but they also control how the electronics they sell function. Macrovision Solutions Corporation<sup>10</sup> is a copyright protection system has been included in electronics since 1983. Bellows recorded broadcast television which during the time was not an issue. Some of the content being recorded to Bellows's video cassette recorder was most likely protected by Macrovision through the closed captions of the broadcast.<sup>11</sup> When Griess's machine attempts to transfer a VHS tape to optical disc, voltage spikes are created in the vertical blanking interval<sup>12</sup> where the closed captions are present and makes the image unable to be recorded. It becomes more complex when a VHS tape will contain a short snippet of a televised broadcast of a late-night talk show which cuts directly to a birthday party and back to another snippet of broadcast television under copyright. This requires Griess to have to pause, fast forward, and monitor recordings which can be extremely tedious and time consuming. Since all of the VHS tapes have not been copied to optical disc there is still an opportunity to reassess these issues within the collection and set out with a revised preservation plan.

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<sup>9</sup> Macworld. "Apple and the Incredible Vanishing CD Drive," October 30, 2012.

<https://www.macworld.com/article/2013146/apple-and-the-incredible-vanishing-cd-drive.html>.

<sup>10</sup> EContent Magazine. "In Focus: Macrovision Corporation," November 14, 2007.

<http://www.econtentmag.com/Articles/Editorial/Feature/In-Focus-Macrovision-Corporation-40203.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> "How to Rip VHS - Anarchivism."

[https://anarchivism.org/w/How\\_to\\_Rip\\_VHS#Dealing\\_with\\_Copy\\_Protection](https://anarchivism.org/w/How_to_Rip_VHS#Dealing_with_Copy_Protection).

<sup>12</sup> "Vertical Blanking Interval." In *Wikipedia*, February 12, 2019.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vertical\\_blinking\\_interval&oldid=882945250](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vertical_blinking_interval&oldid=882945250).



*Fig. 3 - A small portion of the Bellows/Griess/Wesselmann archive.  
Photo by Robin Griess, 2019.*

## Digital Home Memory Preservation Plan

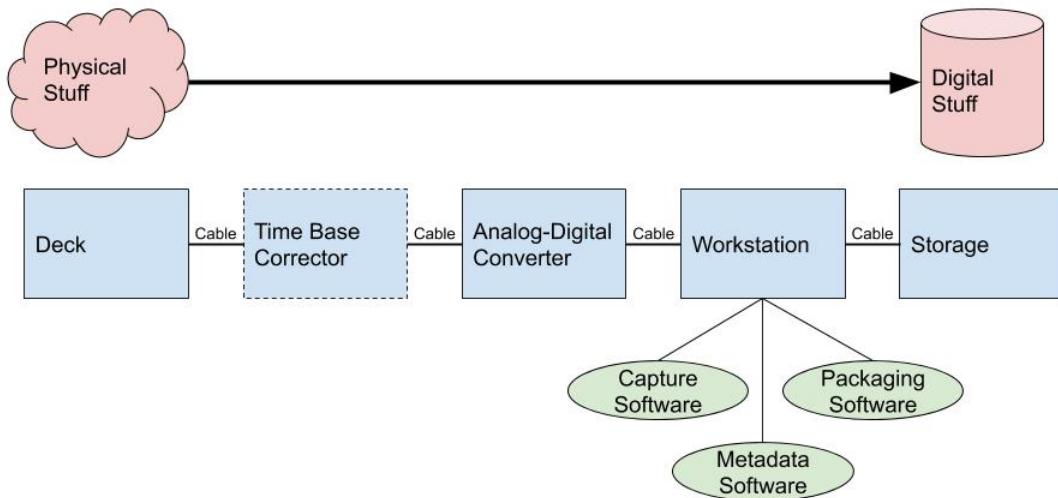
In order to remedy the current challenges facing the preservation of these materials, creating a new digital workflow is highly recommended. Several immediate and long-term goals that need to be addressed:

1. Change the way the VHS tapes are currently being stored
2. Create digital access copies from optical media if restarting the process of VHS tape migration is not an option
3. Purchase digitization equipment to create a Minimal Viable System<sup>13</sup>
4. Create digital access copies of each full VHS tape
5. Further considerations (file storage, spreadsheet with content descriptions, and metadata)

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<sup>13</sup> “Minimum Viable Station Documentation · BLOG Progress Process.” <https://bits.ashleyblewler.com/blog/2016/12/02/minimum-viable-transfer-station-documentation/>.

1.) To ensure that the tape collection does not degrade any faster than it has to, the VHS tapes in the collection should be taken out of plastic totes and stored on shelves in an upright or on end position.<sup>14</sup> This will ensure that less stress is placed on the tape packs and the fluid on the magnetic tape will remain stabilized. 2.) This step is an option if time is a factor that would prohibit creating digital access copies of the entire collection from the original source (VHS tapes). Annie Schwikert recommends creating digital files from optical discs like the ones in the Griess Collection using IsoBuster Pro<sup>15</sup> to create an ISO disc image. 3.) To create the new workflow additional hardware and software will need to be purchased.



*Fig 4. - Minimal Viable Station (Diagram). Ashley Blewer.*

By referencing the Minimum Viable System (Fig. 4) equipment recommendations are as follows: purchase an analog-digital converter, capture software (if not included with AD converter), and multiple external hard drives for storage of digital files. It should be noted that the following

<sup>14</sup> CLIR. “Magnetic Tape Storage and Handling: A Guide for Libraries and Archives • CLIR.” <https://clir.org/pubs/reports/pub54/>.

<sup>15</sup> IsoBuster. “IsoBuster.” <https://www.isobuster.com>.

recommendations are specific to this collection's needs and resources. This MVS is not for creating preservation copies rather priority is geared towards creating access copies for multiple family members. An AD converter is a device that will connect the signal for your formats deck to be sent and received by your storage unit. In this case the deck is a VCR. The storage unit is a Windows based computer workstation. Used AD converters like the Canopus ADVC-100 can be purchased on ebay new or used for \$50-\$100, but it should be noted that Macrovision is still a potential problem as these devices also contain software for detecting copyrighted content. There are options for workarounds such as purchasing a time base corrector<sup>16</sup> and a forum post<sup>17</sup> also referred to in (Fig. 5).

Originally Posted by **hellogain**  
How can I disable Macrovision on the ADVC-100?

It's easiest if you have a TV connected to the output RCA/s-video connectors on the unit, but not essential.

Hold down the "Select" button on the ADVC-100, after three seconds you will see a colour bar test pattern on the TV screen. Keep the button pressed down, and a further twenty seconds later the colour bars will disappear. You may now release the button. The Macrovision Defeat function should now be activated.

If you don't have a TV connected to the outputs, its still the same procedure: just hold the "Select" button down for 30 seconds or so (to be on the safe side).

Good luck.

Ian.

Fig. 5 – A forum post explaining a Marcovision detection workaround with a Canopus ADVC-100 AD converter.  
[forum.videohelp.com](https://forum.videohelp.com/threads/113174-capturing-VHS-movies-using-ADVC-100).

A TBC can also be found on ebay for \$80 - \$180 depending on the brand. This device will ensure the signal that is being recorded from the playback device is in sync with the AD converter. This particular AD converter includes software for digital capture. External hard drives, both small and large, can be purchased at just about any electronic store or online

<sup>16</sup> “How to Rip VHS - Anarchivism.” [https://anarchivism.org/w/How\\_to\\_Rip\\_VHS](https://anarchivism.org/w/How_to_Rip_VHS).

<sup>17</sup> [www.videohelp.com](https://forum.videohelp.com/threads/113174-capturing-VHS-movies-using-ADVC-100). “Capturing VHS Movies Using ADVC-100.” <https://forum.videohelp.com/threads/113174-capturing-VHS-movies-using-ADVC-100>.

shopping website. A time-based corrector could also be purchased to help with the quality of signal that is captured from the VHS tapes but will add to the potential cost of equipment. The Griesses have a VHS tape deck and a Windows based computer workstation that are factored into this MVS.

4.) Once the compatible equipment is purchased, initial transfer tests can be run. File size of each tape will be a factor in terms of storage. It would be advisable to transfer a single complete VHS tape in order to assess storage needs for the entire collection. Once size and storage for the digital assets are determined begin to create digital access copies to ensure that: a) All tapes are captured in their entirety. This would ensure that each VHS tape is digitized to include all



*Fig. 6 - Canopus ADVC-100 AD converter. anarchivism.org.*

of broadcast tv footage as it is an important contextual element from a historical and sociopolitical standpoint. b) All of the digital access copies are at the same standard because they have gone through the same process. According to the manual<sup>18</sup> the Canopus ADVC-100 will output a DV<sup>19</sup> file with dimensions of 720 x 480. DV files can be wrapped as AVI or Quicktime formats with the potential converted into a MP4 or another format using software such as

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<sup>18</sup> Canopus ADVC-100. "User Manual." [https://cvp.com/pdf/canopus\\_advc100.pdf](https://cvp.com/pdf/canopus_advc100.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> "Digital Video Encoding (DV, DVCPAM, DVCPRO)." Web page, February 1, 2012. <https://www.loc.gov/preservation/digital/formats/fdd/fdd000183.shtml>.

HandBrake.<sup>20</sup> 5.) Bellows kept meticulous notes on paper in each VHS box. He would also write on every VHS tape label. It would be important to digitize that metadata information as well. The metadata on each tape should not be overlooked because it provides much content and context for future users of this collection. Create accession numbers for each tape or make sure that file names for the digital copies are linked to each physical VHS tape. The use of an Excel spreadsheet would create a single file for all of this information to be located. This home movie collection will most likely be kept private aside from a few snippets here and there used in my archiving art projects because VHS tape only interacts with a camcorder or a playback device. Whereas digital content is almost always connected to the internet or a system that creates a connection and shares information. This provides us with wonderful possibilities, but certain precautions are necessary to understand what is fully at stake. Unlike this collection, most home memories today are:

1. Made digitally with smartphones
2. Shared with expedience through the internet
3. Are at even greater risk of being lost or even stolen in the blink of an eye

### **Social Media Age: Home Memory in the Wrong Hands**

If Vernon had lived longer, he most certainly would have actively participated in the landscape of digital media dissemination the internet and social media have provided. He would have also been at risk for leaking his data to people interested in harvesting his information as capital. There are millions of people sharing digital media content and user data every day, which is something that social media platforms have taken notice of. User data has become big

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<sup>20</sup> HandBrake. “HandBrake.” <https://handbrake.fr>.

business for companies like Facebook. In 2016, during the U.S. election it was revealed that Facebook allowed the company Cambridge Analytica to target users and their data to create voter profiles with the information that they had collected on 87 million<sup>21</sup> users. That data was then used to create ads to target the affected voters in an attempt to influence the election that year. Facebook is a site that garners “a usage rate of 79% of all online Americans.”<sup>22</sup> As the most popular social media platform users are posting a wide range of information and content in a seemingly benign way. Without considering where “text posts from friends and friends-of-friends; pictures from friends and acquaintances; embedded videos from friends”<sup>23</sup> will end and how they will be used after hitting the post button. It has become too easy to act rather than consider the nuance in the everyday lives that we lead. What we have learned since 2016 is that Facebook does not take responsibility when it comes to maintaining your content in a safe, reliable, or ethically responsible way.<sup>24</sup>

In 2019 it was revealed that Myspace (founded in 2004) lost all of their user’s data because of faulty migration.<sup>25</sup> Every bit of content including songs, photos, and videos posted to the site before 2016 was gone in an instant. That is 13 years of music content or “more than 50m tracks from 14 million artists”<sup>26</sup> reportedly lost. With regards to content users have put too much

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<sup>21</sup> Ingram, David, Arjun Panchadar, and Eric Auchard. 2018. “Facebook Privacy Scandal Widens as Data Leak Hits 87 Million Users.” *CIO* (13284045), April, 5.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=128913417&site=eds-live>.

<sup>22</sup> Robertson, Scott P., author. *Social Media and Civic Engagement : History, Theory, and Practice*. San Rafael, California: Morgan & Claypool, 2018. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Robertson, Scott P., author. *Social Media and Civic Engagement : History, Theory, and Practice*. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Wong, Julia Carrie. “The Cambridge Analytica Scandal Changed the World – but It Didn’t Change Facebook.” *The Guardian*, March 18, 2019, sec. Technology. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/mar/17/the-cambridge-analytica-scandal-changed-the-world-but-it-didnt-change-facebook>.

<sup>25</sup> Hern, Alex. “Myspace Loses All Content Uploaded before 2016.” *The Guardian*, March 18, 2019, sec. Technology. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/mar/18/myspace-loses-all-content-uploaded-before-2016>.

<sup>26</sup> Hern, Alex. “Myspace Loses All Content Uploaded before 2016.”

good faith in social media to keep the images and videos they post safe. Which has proven itself time and time again to be a bad practice. Some social media sites like Instagram (also owned by Facebook) allow you to download your user data.<sup>27</sup> This procedure allows you to receive an email with a download link to a .zip folder containing all the information you have posted onto the platform. This initial step of downloading your own data is extremely important if you are an artist, someone who frequently shares family or personal pictures and videos, or anyone that does not believe that social media companies should maintain sole storage of your digital media profile and its contents. In effect, this action is a rather small but meaningful attempt to maintain or reclaim some control of your content.

In 2019 I was invited to participate in an event series organized by Esther Neff for Performance Art Houston.<sup>28</sup> PAH is an example of an organization that is using the social media platform Instagram as a virtual gallery to display various artist's work. The purpose of this project is to create an archive of performance art being performed within the confines of the platform utilizing the daily feed on a regular basis. My participation in the event took place after I had deleted my personal Instagram account do to concerned over how my personal data and creative output was being handled by the company (Fig. 7). Within this form of artwork display, is PAH thinking about archiving and preserving this project? How the site functions and how users interact with the content becomes an essential component to understanding this project as a whole. By using software like Webrecorder, a project that was created to record and preserve the complex content<sup>29</sup> within a webpage or site. PAH can use this in browser capture device to document the key aspects of their social media project. As we continue to generate content, we

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<sup>27</sup> "How Do I Access or Review My Data on Instagram? | Instagram Help Center." <https://help.instagram.com/181231772500920>.

<sup>28</sup> Performanceart-inst. "Peformance Art Houston" <https://www.performanceartoninstagram.com>.

<sup>29</sup> Webrecorder. "Webrecorder." [https://webrecorder.io/\\_faq](https://webrecorder.io/_faq).

are continually placing that content into the direct risk of being deleted. Either on purpose or accidentally. This is not meant to scare anyone, but it is a reminder that as we continue to move towards a more digital world it does not mean that things will suddenly become easier nor will data and personal memories become more secure

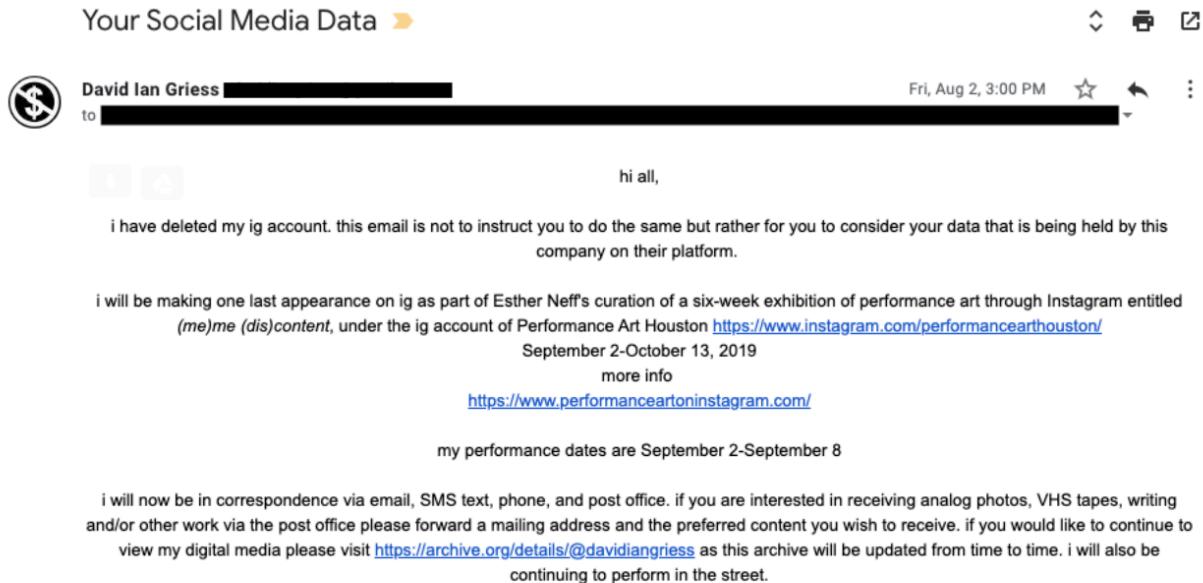


Fig. 7 - David I. Griess. Performance Art Houston. (me)me (dis)content. Curated by Esther Neff. 2019.

## Conclusion

Your memories are an important part of who you are, whether they are experiential or created through a medium. They tell your story, as well as the stories of people around you. Without memory, it becomes very difficult to navigate an everyday life. The act of sharing these memories is a tradition that goes back to the beginning of the earliest people of planet earth. As various recording technologies and internet platforms have made it “easier” to create home memories, they have also made it significantly more difficult to save and control all of these streams of consciousness. In order to construct a manageable system, we must first understand

how we want our content to function in a private and in a public setting. That also means defining what is public and what is private. When we talk about public space,<sup>30</sup> are we talking solely about physical space or something that exists in any space that can be seen by a wider audience such as the internet? Social media platforms or browser settings appear to both private and public space, at least according to how you set them.<sup>31</sup> If we operate under the assumption that everything is public i.e. someone is watching at all times, then are we just giving way to paranoia? We also must understand and strike a balance between access and control of our content. When it comes to technology and the humxn mind, anything that appears to be incredibly simple can actually incredibly complex. Every time we use our devices, we are leaking data. By hitting the record and/or share button there is information being transmitted and captured. It is up to us as individuals to decide how these actions shape our experience. Preserve your home memories for yourself and those that come after you by setting up a minimum viable system. Consider your actions on and off social media. Technology is not our enemy but people who use it to control our minds like programmable machines are.

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<sup>30</sup> Rascovar, Anna, "Washington Square Park: Struggles and Debates over Urban Public Space" (2017). CUNY Academic Works. [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/2019.3](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/2019.3).

<sup>31</sup> Satvat, Kiavash, Matthew Forshaw, Feng Hao, and Ehsan Toreini. 2014. "On the Privacy of Private Browsing – A Forensic Approach." *Journal of Information Security and Applications* 19 (1): 88–100. doi:10.1016/j.jisa.2014.02.002.

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<https://help.instagram.com/181231772500920>.

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A specific section of a guide for detailing how to deal with digitizing VHS content under copyright.

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<http://now.bt.co/bundles/vernonfbellows>.

BitTorrent page maintained by the HUMAN TRASH DUMP archive. Six digitized VHS videos are available to download and stream by the late Vernon F. Bellows.

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as Data Leak Hits 87 Million Users." *CIO* (13284045), April, 5.  
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## Appendix



Fig. 9 - Meshuggah. Destroy Erase Improve. 1995. Discogs.